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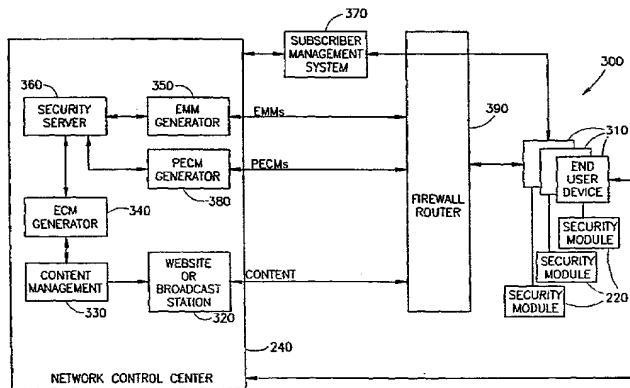
(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **SHEN-ORR, Chaim, D. [IL/IL]**; NDS Technologies Israel Limited,P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL). **HIBSHOOSH, Eli** [IL/IL]; NDS Technologies Israel Limited, P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL). **EPSTEIN, Steve** [IL/IL]; NDS Technologies Israel Limited, P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL). **WALD, Stephanie** [IL/IL]; NDS Technologies Israel Limited, P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL). **BELENKY, Yaakov** [IL/IL]; NDS Technologies Israel Limited, P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL). **SHAPIRO, Yigal** [IL/IL]; NDS Technologies Israel Limited, P.O. Box 23012, 5A Hamarpe Street, 91235 Jerusalem (IL).(74) Agent: **BODNER, Marc**; Plinner, Bodner, Brass, Beit Agish Ravad, 13 Noah Mozes Street, 67442 Tel Aviv (IL).

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(54) Title: DIGITAL CONTENT DELIVERY SYSTEM AND METHOD

**WO 01/50755 A1**

(57) **Abstract:** A system and a method for flexible, yet secure distribution of digital content items, optionally with an automatic payment mechanism for purchasing such content. The present invention supports the distribution of content to end user devices from a central distribution point (320), as in client-server models and variations thereof, and/or peer-to-peer distribution, for example between end user devices (310). In addition, the present invention also supports distribution models within either of these mechanisms for unitary distribution, to a specified end user device, or broadcast/multicast distribution, to a plurality of end user devices. In any case, in order for the distributed content to be operative, for example to be "played back" or otherwise displayed, the recipient end user device (310) must be in communication with a network control center (240). The network control center then enables the recipient end user device to play back or otherwise display the received content, for example by sending a code to the recipient end user device. Optionally, the network control center may require payment to be received before enabling the content for the recipient end user device. Thus, the present invention supports flexible distribution of content according to a number of different distribution models, while still preventing unauthorized play back or other display throughout the lifecycle of the digital content item, and optionally enabling assured payments.



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